

IDENTITY AND THE FORMATION  
OF THE SELF

PAPER 1

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## PREFACE

In exploring my motivations for selecting the topic "Identity and the formation of the Self" I recognize two streams of thought which have brought me to an interest in this area.

The first stems from a research interest dating back to July 1969 when I completed a research project on "The Study of Group Roles in terms of the Cultural Atom of an Individual." This research project was submitted as part of the requirements for the Intern III level of Psychodrama training at the National Center for Mental Health Services, Training and Research, Washington D.C. In this project I postulated that:

1. The roles which an individual takes with his family will be repeated in other groups.
2. The dynamics of the primary family will determine the roles of the individual in other groups.<sup>1</sup>

The psychodramatic concept of the cultural atom of the individual, i.e. the range of roles and counter roles and the pattern of role relationships which emerges around an individual, was used to record behaviour of subjects in a family therapy group and in a ward group. The data was analysed on two dimensions: firstly the reciprocity of role relationships and secondly the clustering of roles. The data did not provide sufficient evidence for testing the second hypothesis. The first hypothesis was refuted and evidence suggested that the behaviour of individuals

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<sup>1</sup>Lynette Clayton, "A Study of Group Roles in terms of the Cultural Atom of an Individual," unpublished research paper, National Center for Mental Health Services, Training & Research, 1969, p. 11.

in the group situation was influenced by a broader concept than roles. It was as if the individual had a basic total system similar to the self concept or script which influenced the emergence of specific role behaviours.

Psychodrama did not provide a concept with which to discuss the perceptual model the person has of himself so that Eric Berne's concept of script was used in the discussion of results. Psychodrama did however provide a concept for looking on at this total self and that concept is autotele---the individual's way of looking at himself and his feeling towards that self. There was a need for two concepts; one which described a total identity and another which related an objective part of the person which stands off and sees the whole.

Dr. Moreno in later discussing the research with me asked me to go back to an article which he had written in 1938. He pointed out that he outlined there that the psyche is pressing for expression and that the body provides only a partial expression of it. I intend therefore to explore Dr. Moreno's concept of the personality at greater depth and particularly his concept of the catharsis of integration as a means of developing the self.

The second stream of thought which has brought me to explore this area has been my own clinical work with adolescents in the past fifteen months. I had a number of adolescents in treatment, some of whom had been or were regular drug takers, mainly of marijuana and L.S.D. Two particular adolescents had a similar constellation of symptoms---high dependence, intrusion of fantasy into ongoing thought processes, anxiety about failure,

and a compulsive use of fantasy as an escape. There seemed to be a common problem amongst many of an identity problem. Many had a creative variety of roles or behaviours but there seemed to be no executive or integrated whole. They were therefore confused, had no idea of how their behaviour was perceived by others and alternately were dependent and counter-dependent in an effort to handle their confusion.

A combination of psychodrama and transactional analysis was used in all cases. Some showed marked improvement and were able to return to school or tackle a job situation. Others were unable to make use of the therapy provided and behaviour remained much the same. The question arose in my mind: What were the turning points in the treatment process? What were the factors which could have pointed to prognosis? While I do not intend to present case material at depth it lies behind the questions which I am asking in exploring the issue of "Identity and the formation of the self."

My interest in this area as a legitimate area of concern for study seems to be collaborated by a recent article in the International Mental Health Research Newsletter where Milton Klein writes that there seems to be some ambiguity at least in psychoanalytic writings between the ego as a conceptual representative of the unconscious world and self as the macro-structure. He defines the ego as "an unconscious structure; it carries the function of defense and mediates the demands of the inner world."<sup>2</sup> Self is defined as assuming the cognitive,

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<sup>2</sup>Milton Klein, "Remarks on Ego and Self in Psychoanalytic Theory," International Mental Health Research Newsletter, vol. XIV, No. 1, Spring 1972, p. 13.

affective and integrative functions; this in turn mediates relations to reality. "The self is the conceptual representative of the real, or external world."<sup>3</sup>

A further general term will be used in this study. The term identity will be used basically to refer to the individual's way of seeing himself as if he has an objective self which looks on at the whole.

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<sup>3</sup>Klein, "Remarks on Ego and Self...", p. 13.

### INTRODUCTION

This topic "Identity and the formation of the self" views personality from the inside of the person. It sees personality as an internal structure which influences the selection and organization of perceptions and the response by behavioural acts. It postulates that the person is acting as if he had a view of himself which he is concerned to enact and to maintain. Treatment in clinical situations consists of making the self concept explicit either behaviourally or intellectually so that choice about its expression can be made.

Three terms are used in this paper. Ego is used as a general term to refer to the perceptual organizational structure within the individual which mediates the individual's internal needs. Self is used as a general term to refer to a macrostructure, an integrated core which enables the person to act consistently. Identity is used as a general term to describe the way the individual views himself and his feelings about his self image.

Specific questions which arise at the present time are:

1. Which theories of personality contain a concept of self?
2. Which theories of personality contain a concept of identity?
3. What are the mechanisms of the process of development of the self? How are they best described? Are they experimentally verifiable concepts?
4. What conditions give rise to the formation of identity?
5. Is identity a wholistic organizing influence within the personality?
6. Why is an identity maintained in the face of negative reinforcement from the environment?

7. How does the concept of integration relate to identity and the formation of the self?

The procedure I intend to adopt in pursuing study in this area is to read various theorists in depth and to organize my reading around the above topic and questions. Various other specific areas for study may arise from reading and gaining further information.

By the end of second term I plan to have covered the following theorists: Moreno, Berne, Erikson, Freud, Angyal, Rogers, Horney and Kelley and to have submitted papers on these. During second term I would also like to focus on the topics of self, identity and integration as global concepts. In third term I plan to review experimental literature in the area already outlined.

PSYCHODRAMA THEORY OF DR. J. L. MORENO

Dr. J. L. Moreno has developed a theory of the person and his development based on the role concept. He goes beyond this to viewing the person on a much larger scale as interacting with his environment through his roles and role structures. Various concepts in Dr. Moreno's theory will be looked at in relation to the formation of self and identity.

The individual as a system of roles.--The term "role" has been used by various theorists to mean different things. Dr. J. L. Moreno uses it as "the functioning form the individual assumes in the specific moment he reacts to a specific situation in which other persons or objects are involved."<sup>4</sup> A role is therefore a unit of behaviour which is observable. It is specific to a situation and to the people or objects present in that situation. Its meaning as an act cannot be understood outside the context in which it takes place.

in Psychodrama volume 1 Dr. Moreno outlines his spontaneity theory of child development. He describes the assumption underlying his theory. He differentiates it from a biological-evolutionary approach which relies on the study of a human being as an animal and from Freud's theory which arose from a study of syndromes of the neurotic adult, the abnormal personality. He sees the child in terms of his potential, as having dormant capabilities and skills which are potentially there awaiting expression through enactment. It is the genius of the race who maximizes his capabilities that Moreno takes as a prototype.

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<sup>4</sup>J. L. Moreno, Psychodrama, vol. 1., New York: Beacon House, 1964, p. IV.



He says "men of genius warm up with their whole organism in status nascendi to creative deeds and works."<sup>5</sup> This state of being born is a spontaneity state which men of genius attain to the highest degree. Spontaneity and creativity are primary and positive phenomena which contribute to the organization and expression of personality.

Birth provides a prototype of situations which the infant will face later.

The infant is moving at birth, into a totally strange set of relationships. He has no model after which he can shape his acts. He is facing, more than at any time during his subsequent life, a novel situation. We have called this response of an individual to a new situation--and the new response to an old situation--spontaneity.<sup>6</sup>

He sees spontaneity or the s factor as a factor which enables the infant to reach beyond himself and to move into new situations while stimulating, arousing and modifying his own organism. The s factor is an area of the person which is relatively free and independent from biological and social determinants and can enable new acts, choices, decisions which lead to inventiveness and creativity. "The s factor is the soil out of which later the spontaneous, creative matrix of personality grows."<sup>7</sup> His approach is a growth approach and the energy source is open ended thus potentially allowing for unending expansion.

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<sup>5</sup>Moreno, Psychodrama, vol. 1., p. 49.

<sup>6</sup>Moreno, Psychodrama, vol. 1., p. 50.

<sup>7</sup>J. L. Moreno, "Mental Catharsis and the Psychodrama," Sociometry, vol. 3, no. 3, 1940, pp. 218-220.

From the initial acts of the child larger units of behaviour called roles become apparent. The first roles to develop are psychosomatic roles which are physiologically determined, such as the sleeper, the eater and the sexual role. Later social roles develop. These are prescribed by the culture and are taught both by the family and social institutions. Although social roles have expected or prescribed behaviours, some variation in the way a role is taken by the individual is accepted. As Moreno puts it

The (functioning) form is created by past experiences and the cultural patterns of the society in which the individual lives. Every role is a fusion of private and collective elements.<sup>8</sup>

The collective aspect of the social roles is prescribed on the basis of status which goes along with position in a social system. Each position in the social system has a set of norms or commonly held behavioural expectations. These provide the individual with rough boundaries within which he must function if his position in the social system is to be positively sanctioned.

The private aspects of the social role indicate other needs in the individual. As Moreno puts it

the individual craves to embody far more roles than those he is allowed to act out in life, and even within the same role one or more varieties of it...It is from the active pressure which these multiple individual units exert upon the manifest official role that a feeling of anxiety is often produced.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>J. L. Moreno, "The Role Concept: A Bridge Between Psychiatry and Sociology," Am. Jnl Psychiatry, vol. 118, 1961-62, p. 519.

<sup>9</sup>J. L. Moreno, Psychodrama, vol. 1, p. V.

Moreno further clarifies this conflict in developmental terms by introducing his concept of psychodramatic roles. At a certain point in the development of the child, fantasy and reality which were previously undifferentiated, become divided. Social roles develop in response to reality; at the same time psychodramatic roles emerge in the realm of fantasy. Psychodramatic roles are variously defined by Moreno as "the personification of imagined things, both real and unreal,"<sup>10</sup> God roles,<sup>11</sup> ghosts, fairies and hallucinated roles.<sup>12</sup> These are a world of inner experience of internal roles or figures which dominate the world of the individual. Psychodramatic roles are far more extensive and dominating than social roles.

Moreno would therefore see as primary to identity and the formation of the self, the psychodramatic roles of the person. These are continually pressing for expression and may take socially useful or socially disapproved of forms. For instance a man with a psychodramatic role of suffering servant may perform at a high rate of productivity in a factory where conditions of work are poor. Where he is promoted on the basis of this productivity to floor manager over several men he may become accident prone and constantly suffering from a variety of ailments until he finally changes to another factory and renounces his seniority.

The self then in Moreno's terms is a system of roles. How does this system of roles form a structure which provides

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<sup>10</sup>Moreno, Psychodrama, vol. 1, p. 77.

<sup>11</sup>Moreno, Psychodrama, vol. 1, p. 72.

<sup>12</sup>J. L. Moreno, "Role Theory and Emergence of the Self," Group Psychotherapy, XV, 1962, p. 114.

a self and an identity?

The self as an internal structure of role linkages.—

1. Clustering. Moreno identifies one of the ways in which the self is formed is by clustering of roles. Roles emerge before they are organized into wholes. It is by their clustering and unification that a self becomes identifiable. Moreno postulates that the child is an undifferentiated universe where there is no guiding structure. There is therefore no experience of a self. By the action of spontaneity, responsive acts emerge. Moreno states that "the roles are the embryos, the forerunners of the self; the roles strive towards clustering and unification."<sup>13</sup> Psychosomatic roles begin to cluster providing an experience of "body;" social roles cluster providing an experience of "society;" and psychodramatic roles cluster forming an experience of "psyche." There is then a further gradual development of operational and contact links between the social, the psychological and the physiological rolesclusters. This takes place in order that we can identify and experience after their unification, that which we call the "me" or the "I." There are frequent imbalances in the clustering of roles within the area of psychosomatic roles or social roles and imbalances between these areas. These imbalances produce delay in the emergence of an experienced self or sharpen disturbances of the self.

2. Operational links to gain maximum satisfaction. Operational links between roles are formed as well as links between the psychosomatic social and psychodramatic parts of the self. One

<sup>13</sup>Moreno, Psychodrama, vol. 1, p. III.

of the functions of these operational links is to gain maximum satisfaction from the environment. This organization of roles to gain maximum satisfaction has a learned component resulting from contact with persons in the environment. While spontaneity determines the particular and individual way by which new learning will be organized, there are still inputs from the environment which play an important part. The people in this process and the feelings towards them are termed the social atom by Moreno.

3. The Social Atom as an organizing concept. The term social atom can be looked at from two perspectives—from the point of view of the individual or the point of view of society. From the point of view of society which we are not concerned about here, the social atoms of individuals interact and form complex chains of interrelations or networks. From the point of view of the individual the social atom is a structure which provides the context in which learning takes place.

The social atom is that peculiar pattern of inter-personal relations which develops from the time of human birth. It first contains mother and child. As time goes on, it adds from the persons who come into the child's orbit such persons as are unpleasant or pleasant to him and vice versa, those to whom he is unpleasant or pleasant. Persons who do not leave any impression, positive or negative, remain outside the social atom as mere acquaintances. The feeling which correlates two or more individuals has been called tele. The social atom is therefore a compound of the tele relationships of an individual. As positively or negatively charged persons may leave the individual's social atom and others may enter it, ~~the~~ social atom has a more or less ever-changing constellation.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>J. L. Moreno, Psychodramatic Shock Therapy, Psychodrama Monographs, No. 5, New York: Beacon House, 1959, p. 3.

It is therefore in the context provided by the social atom that responses are learned. The material which originally contributes to the formation of learned responses is not always available to the person at a later date. Dr. Moreno postulates that the psychosomatic self (the body) and the social self (society) allow for expression of only part of the self.

4. The Cultural Atom as an organizing concept. The concept of the cultural atom is used to describe further the operational links between roles. The cultural atom may include psychodramatic roles which have not come to full expression. It may also include roles which emerged towards people who are no longer present in the social atom. There may also be "model" or imagined concepts such as "the perfect housewife" contained in the cultural atom.

Moreno says of the cultural atom:

We consider roles and relationships between roles as the most significant development within any specific culture. The pattern of role relations around an individual as their focus is called his cultural atom. Every individual, just as he has a set of friends and a set of enemies,--a social atom--also has a range of roles facing a range of counter-roles. The tangible aspects of what is known as the 'ego' are the roles in which he operates.<sup>15</sup>

The cultural atom therefore provides a structure for looking at units of behaviour and the operational links between them. It also provides an internal structure of roles which may not be shown or enacted so that they are unobservable.

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<sup>15</sup>J. L. Moreno, Sociometry and the Cultural Order, Sociometry Monographs, No. 2, New York: Beacon House, 1943, p. 331.

The Person as a totality of interlocking systems.--

In his article "Sociometry in Relation to Other Social Sciences," Moreno describes the sociometric picture of the person. The psyche surround the body and is itself surrounded by ~~the~~ interwoven into the social and cultural atoms. The person is therefore linked to other persons and it is in an interactive sense that there are stored totalities of feelings and physical and mental starters which arouse them. Moreno makes it clear that the emergence of behaviour is tied to an original context and that specific behaviours have been added to an individual's repertoire by the action of spontaneity in a specific situation at a specific time. He also makes clear that the person through his totality is a dynamic organism connected inextricably with the socius.

A social atom is thus composed of numerous tele structures; social atoms are again parts of a still larger pattern, the psychological networks which bind or separate large groups<sup>7</sup> of individuals due to their tele relationships. Psychological networks are parts of a still larger unit, the psychological geography of a community. A community is again part of the largest configuration, the psychological totality of human society itself.<sup>8</sup>

It can be seen then that Moreno thinks in terms of interlocking systems which have a hierarchy so that the roles of an individual as mapped by the cultural atom are contained within the social atom which is itself contained within psychological networks of groups of individuals and so on. This raises the issue of

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<sup>16</sup>J. L. Moreno, "Sociometry in Relation to Other Social Sciences," (1937) reprinted in J. L. Moreno, Sociometry, Experimental Method and The Science of Society, New York: Beacon House, 1951, p. 24.

whether there is any continuity or core which is stable and identifiable.

A stable but changing total self.---Units of behaviour do not emerge without prior models. Dr. Moreno postulates that the s factor can bring about new perceptions and new behaviours but these then become part of the conserve of the individual and form a repertory of roles on which the person can draw. Roles have a duration---a beginning, a ripening and a fading out. A role may vanish when it has served its purpose but it continues as a dynamic factor in the inner life. New roles ~~by~~ draw strengthening support from old roles until they are established in their own right. At times new roles may emerge spontaneously but this is rare.

This means that cultural atoms also change over time in their observable content. But these changes do not necessarily mean that the configuration of the cultural atom at one time does not have a dynamic similarity with its configuration at another time. There is a tendency for people as important objects who leave to be replaced by others who fulfil similar needs. It is probable that the same kind of thing happens with the role structure of an individual. New roles may replace old ones but a total configuration with a similar equilibrium remains.<sup>17</sup> It becomes clear that Moreno does not explore further and more specifically the idea of the self. He leaves it as a homeostatic principle governing the functioning of the individual at different levels of interlocking systems.

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<sup>17</sup>J. L. Moreno, Psychodramatic Treatment of Psychosis, Psychodrama Monographs, no. 15, New York: Beacon House, 1945, pp. 120-121.



The Person looks at himself.—The person as he develops an integrated self, begins to develop also a relationship to himself. Dr. Moreno describes it as follows:

As an infant grows he not only experiences other people but also himself. This picture of himself may differ considerably from the picture others have of him, but it becomes considerably significant for him as life goes on. Finally it appears as if he had, besides his real ego, an outside ego which he gradually extrojects. Between the ego and his extrojection a peculiar feeling relationship develops which may be called autotele.<sup>18</sup>

Just as a person has a feeling towards others therefore he develops a feeling towards his total self. Moreno does not focus on the way in which this assists in either the expression or the functioning of the personality.

Summary.—Dr. Moreno looks at the individual in terms of role theory. On a developmental level he sees the self emerging as roles cluster and form a progressively integrated pattern within the individual. The assumption behind this is that integration is a directional force and that the energy for integration is supplied by the s factor or spontaneity of the individual. Movement is toward the genius as prototype of the race in whom potentialities are maximized in terms of creative acts.

Also playing an important role in the formation of the self is learning which takes place in a specific context. The concepts of cultural atom, social atom and sociometric configurations imply that the self is a composite formed in a dynamic interactive context in which the s factor in the individual combines with social roles learned in specific contexts to form

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<sup>18</sup>Moreno, Psychodramatic Shock Therapy, p. 4.

a unique individual.

During this outline of Dr. Moreno's theory in relation to the formation of the self and identity, integration has been mentioned as an important concept. It seems important to discuss the way in which Moreno sees integration as contributing to the formation of the self.

Integration.---Although this topic is not dealt with specifically in Dr. Moreno's work, assumptions can be made from various references in his works.

1. The necessity for congruity of context and content in learning.

In his formulation of the Spontaneity Theory of Learning, Dr. Moreno has emphasised that learning takes place in a context. The inner life of the individual, his reactions to stimulation from the total environment will place an emotional loading on the content of material learned and will affect its recall. A clinical example of the effects of this can often be seen in school dropouts where the context in which learning takes place and the emotional loading of learned material have prevented the expression and development of both spontaneity and learning. The goal of psychodrama in this case is to "loosen the fixed associations between states and contents as they have become established in the course of education by the traditional method."<sup>19</sup> For integration of new learned material to take place, in such a way that it will be useful to the person, there must be congruity between context and content.

2. The integration of content and act. In further discussing

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<sup>19</sup>J. L. Moreno, Who Shall Survive? New York: Beacon House, 1953, p. 538.

integration Moreno hypothesizes two centers of memory--an act center and a content center--which exist as two separate structures. This means that content or facts which are learned may be stored away but be unavailable to the act center because of the context in which they are learned. New knowledge which is learned intellectually may then not be integrated into the active personality of the individual. Perhaps an illustration of this is that intellectual insight will not have any direct influence on behaviour if integration within the person's content and act centers has not taken place. Moreno makes the comment that "knowledge remains undigested, unabsorbed by the personality and hinders its full influence upon activity and judgment. In actual life situations the supreme desideratum is ...this facility of integration."<sup>20</sup> It is only when the content center made up of knowledge and experience is integrated with the act center that the person will feel real and fulfilled.

3. The concept of dynamic integration. Psychodrama has as its goal to develop and sustain a spontaneous and flexible personality make-up. It is the aim of role reversal for instance to integrate the stance of many persons involved in a situation so that the protagonist can be more novel and more appropriate in his response. Role reversal does not produce a passive or permissive stance but rather one in which an active role is taken in relation to a number of viewpoints.

Moreno's concept of integration is a dynamic concept rather than a static one. The assumption of a closed mind is

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<sup>20</sup>Moreno, Who Shall Survive? p. 538

realization of self, not only release and relief but also equilibrium and peace. It is not a catharsis of abreaction but a catharsis of integration.<sup>21</sup>

Progressive integrations within the structure of the self provide for an equilibrium which is changing and yet forms a basis for action and perception at any one point in time. It is from the experience of this catharsis of integration that a realization of self and a feeling of being at peace with that self come.

Dr. Moreno's views on the issue of self and its formation have been covered in sufficient detail to now enable the questions posed in the introduction to this paper, to be answered in terms of his theory. The final section of this paper will therefore cover the questions raised about "Identity and the formation of the self."

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<sup>21</sup>Moreno, Who Shall Survive? p. 546.

CRITICAL REVIEW

The questions raised in the Introduction to this paper are by no means final nor do they necessarily provide the best framework for looking at theories of personality from the point of view of formation of identity and the self. It is therefore assumed that the format of the critical review in various papers submitted will vary. However the present format is adhered to in the paper.

The concept of self.---In Moreno's writing the self is an equilibrium which is always in the process of change. The only way it can be grasped is to assume its existence from structures such as roles, the cultural atom and the social atom of the individual. Nevertheless these structures assume a continuity over time and the externalized self looking on forms a feeling about the self.

The concept of identity.---The term autotele has been coined by Moreno to describe the feeling the person has towards himself. He talks of an extrojected self which can see the self acting in situations with others. In terms of the definition of identity assumed in this paper, autotele would approximate to identity. It should be noted however that Dr. Moreno does use the term identity but in relation to man's consciousness of belonging to a race. It is an archaic sense of being one which is left over from the child's early experience of an undifferentiated world which Moreno calls the "matrix of all identity."

Mechanisms of development of the self.---The development of the self is postulated in role terms. The self emerges out of the roles which are defined as the functioning from an individual takes at a specific moment in a specific situation. A role is a unit of behaviour. The roles cluster and their operational links between psychosomatic, social and psychodramatic roles form unique patterns of organization in the individual. These can be analysed in terms of the cultural atom, the range of roles and counter-roles around the individual, and of the social atom, the range of people with whom the individual has feeling relationships.

Conditions giving rise to formation of identity.---For the formation of identity, integration must occur at progressive levels. For integration to occur there must be spontaneity operating, there must be congruence between content and context, and the content and act centers in the personality must be free to integrate. The system must be open to change rather than rigidly conserved and static.

Identity as a wholistic organizing influence.---Moreno specifically states that the Gestalt concept of the whole determining the function of the parts is foreign to his ideas. He is interested in the analysis of various systems or wholes and their relationship to one another. He has no directional or growth concept except that it is implied that spontaneity and integration reach progressively high levels. Moreno is more interested in actualization of potential in a socially defined context than in such ideas as maturity, or intimacy. His concept of autotele provides no directional influence on the development of the self.

Maintenance of identity in the face of negative reinforcement.—The maintenance of an identity which brings pain to the individual would be seen by Moreno in terms of the psychodramatic roles of the person. The person may be interested to maintain a role of sufferer, or persecuted saviour for instance so that negative reinforcement from the environment will tend to comply with the autotele of the individual.<sup>7</sup>

Integration and identity.—Integration is central in Moreno's terms for the formation of identity and the self. As this is discussed briefly before no further detail will be given here.

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